

Remarks/Arguments

Election of Species Requirement

The Examiner has issued an Election of Species requirement for the instant application and required Applicants to designate which claims should be placed within each disclosed species. The Examiner identified the following Species in the Office Action:

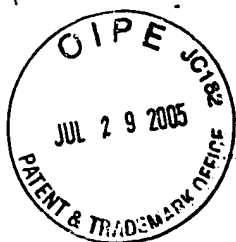
- Species 1 Figures 1 and 2
- Species 2 Figure 3
- Species 3 No figure. Relates to Claim 21

Applicants have divided pending Claims 2-5, 7-9, 11-13, 15, 17, 19-22 into the following species:

- Species 1 Figures 1 and 2; and Claims 2-5, 7-9, 11-13, 15, 17, 19, and 20
- Species 2 Figure 3; and Claims 2-5, 7-9, 11-13, and 15
- Species 3 Claims 21 and 22

Applicants hereby elect **Species 1, Figures 1 and 2; and Claims 2-5, 7-9, 11-13, 15, 17, 19, and 20** with traverse.

Applicants respectfully traverse the Examiner's statement that no claim is currently generic. Applicants courteously point out that Claim 2 recites elements found in each of the Species 1 and 2 defined by the Examiner. Further, each element of Claim 2 is found in each of Species 1 and 2. The elements of Claim 2 and the features of Species 1 and 2 are correlated as follows:



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Claim 2 element	Species 1	Species 2	Comment
an elastically deformable base ring (2)	Ring 2 is shown	Ring 2 is shown	
a stiffening ring (3, 3', 3'') for limiting compression of the base ring (2)	Figure 1 shows 3 and Figure 2 shows 3'	Figure 3 shows 3''	3, 3', and 3'' all are included in this element – each is positioned and configured to limit the compression of ring (2)
at least one protective layer (4), wherein the at least one protective layer (4) covers at least a portion of the base ring (2)	Figures 1 and 2 each show coating 4	Figure 3 shows coating 4	
wherein the stiffening ring is provided at at least one of the inner circumferential edge of the base ring (2) or the outer circumferential edge of the base ring (2)	Figures 1 and 2 show stiffening rings 3 and 3', respectively, on outer circumference	Figure 3 shows stiffening ring 3'' on outer circumference	3, 3', and 3'' all meet the requirements of this element
wherein the stiffening ring (3, 3', 3'') comprises hard plastic or metal and has, at least perpendicularly to the ring plane, a lesser deformability, or greater firmness, than the base ring (2)	Structure shown in Figures 1 and 2 supports this element	Structure shown in Figure 3 supports this element	
wherein the height of the stiffening ring perpendicularly to the ring plane is less than the greatest height of the base ring (2) perpendicularly to the ring plane	3 and 3' in Figures 1 and 2, respectively, are shown with a lesser height	3' in Figure 3 is shown with a lesser height	

The above table shows that every element of Claim 2 is disclosed in each of Figures 1, 2, and 3.

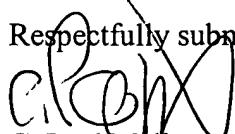
A difference between the aspects shown in Figures 1 and 2 and the aspect shown in Figure 3 is described as follows: "In the variant according to Figure 3, the *stiffening ring 3*" (emphasis added) is provided at the outer circumferential edge of the base ring 2 although, in contrast with the variants according to Figures 1 and 2, it *is not formed as a single piece with the material of the protective layer 4* (emphasis added). In the variant according to Figure 3, the stiffening ring 3" is composed of hard plastic or metal, and is embedded in form-locking manner into the elastically deformable material 6 of the base ring 2." (paragraph [0029]). Based on the above, Claims 17, 19, and 20 recite a difference between the aspects shown Figures 1 and 2, and the aspect shown in Figure 3. Specifically, these claims recite: "...wherein the stiffening ring (3, 3', 3'') and the protective layer (4) are produced as a single piece from the same material." This configuration of the stiffening ring and protective layer is clearly shown in Figures 1 and 2. The contrasting configuration, in which the ring and layer are separately formed is not explicitly recited in a claim, but is shown in Figures 3 and described in paragraph [0029] of the specification as noted *supra*. As noted *supra*, the elements of Claim 2 are applicable to Figure 3.

MPEP § 806.04 (d) defines a generic claim as a claim that reads on each view of the separate species. Applicants respectfully submit that Claim 2, by claiming elements found in each of Figures 1, 2, and 3, does in fact read on the figures in each species. Further, there are no elements in Claim 2 that do not read on each of Figures 1, 2, and 3. Therefore Applicants respectfully request withdrawal of the election of species requirement for Species 1 and 2 and the initiation of examination of claims 2-5, 7-9, 11-13, 15, 17, 19, and 20 on the merits.

Conclusion

Applicant respectfully submits that the present application is now in condition for examination on the merits, which action is courteously requested. The Examiner is invited and encouraged to contact the undersigned agent of record if such contact will facilitate an efficient examination and allowance of the application.

Respectfully submitted,



C. Paul Maliszewski
Registration No. 51,990
Simpson & Simpson, PLLC
5555 Main Street
Williamsville, NY 14221-5406
Telephone No. 716-626-1564

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